

THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (July 1992)

Welcome to Volume One, Issue Five, of **The Mark Nelson Experience**.

PUBLISHER: Mark 'Crazy Markie' Nelson, 21 Cecil Mount, Armley, Leeds, WEST RIDING. LS12 2AP ENGLAND

Work (0532)-335175 (but I'm not often in my office and a foreign student normally answers the phone so leave messages at your own peril) Home (0532)-637878 (best to ring between 10.00pm and 00.30am or before 10.00am) INTERNET amt5man@sun.leeds.ac.uk or amt5man@sun.ecusun.ac.uk.leeds

The Mark Nelson Experience is available to everyone on the mailing list (circulation this issue is 30). This zine contains Hobby discussion.¹

This is **West Riding Press Publications 214**

"No, there isn't enough news and gossip to fill a global hobby magazine." *Mike Siggins*
Electric Monk 31 (August 1991)

Mission From God: Has it past it's sell-by date?

For much of the early to mid 1980's the British Hobby was adequately served by a succession of listing zines. From the ashes of **Twenty Five Years On**² arose **Twenty Years On** (which was at its best under it's first editor, Simon Billenness) which in turn would give rise to the most ambitious listing zine ever seen, **Zine With No Name**.³ The bigger they come, the faster they fall. **Zwnn** collapsed within months of starting⁴ and by the summer of 1986 it was clear that the hobby was without a listings zine for the first time since most could remember.

Having had one for so long this was considered to be a matter of some concern. But was it all that it was cracked up to be? Is a listing zine a luxury item that, in reality, plays no constructive part in the hobby?

A regular theme in this journal has been the decline in wide-spread trading and an associated decline in the number of editors supporting/believing in the concept of a unified hobby. A listing zine helps to paper over some of the cracks by providing a list of zines that are around and providing some kind of commentary on 'where it is at'.

This article will not discuss the ins and outs of the different listing zines and how they were viewed by the hobby. Instead we will continue with our story, and in doing so we must pay a visit to the dark and deep backwaters of a city where only fools tread lightly...

In The Beginning there was a pub. A pub on the wrong side of Birmingham⁵. A badly lit, smoke-filled pub with plenty of bheer and not much else. A place where shady deals were made and petty criminals hung-out.

In a corner to one side of the bar were a pile of empties, a grey overcoat and one of Fandom's best with his faithful toady. These disreputable looking characters, the worse for wear, were talking. "Why don't we run a listings zine?" "Great idea."

¹ Actually it contains Crazie Markie writings about the Hobby.

² Come to think of it this zine might have been called **Compendium**

³ Editor Martin Le Fevre wanted to produce a quarterly listings zine, à la **20YO**, with a monthly hobby news/gossip column, à la **Schhol For Scandal**

⁴ only one listing issue and one hobby news issue being produced

⁵ Come to think of it, is there a *right* side of Birmingham?

Like all such great fannish ideas it was promptly forgotten. Neither Pete Doubleday nor Iain Bowen had any intention of getting down to it and producing a new listings zine. So the idea was forgotten about...

Some time later fellow conspirer Pete Tulk suggested that it would be a really great idea to produce a new listings zine, what did the other think? Of such things are legends made.

Pete Doubleday and Iain Bowen may have been the first to suggest the need for a new listings zine to replace the defunct **Twenty Years On** and **Zine With No Name** but it was Pete Tulk who galvanised them into action and motivated the production of the first issue. Some time later Bowen and Tulk would fall out and in a classic Palace Coup Tulk would be given the shove with Bowen taking over as *el President*, in days thereafter the sad, and pathetic, figure of Pete Tulk would haunt ManorCons and the streets of Birmingham complaining about how the nasty Bowen's had tricked him out of his precious, gollum, and how it would seek his revenge...

Mission From God was a break with the traditional approach to producing a listing zine, which noted waiting lists, games running and provided a short one or two sentence comment on a zine. 'Hard-hitting' was a phrase commonly used to describe the new review stance. 'Conspicuous toadying to those in favour and blasting of everyone else' is another phrase that springs to mind. Still this is not a review of the early issues of **Mission of God** which although full of bile and anger at least troubled Fandonia in its restless sleep.

The following casts some light on the original **Mission From God** team and hobby reaction to their baby.

Geoff Challenger: "The consensus of opinion on the Doubleday/Tulk/Bowen listings zine **Mission From God** seems to have been a barely-suppressed giggle followed by the thought that it isn't exactly what the innocent newcomer needs to find his way around. Combining this with the time-pressure problems currently being suffered by the organiser of the **Novice Package**, Steve Doubleday, and we have an opportunity for a service covering the territory between the two.

John Dodds steps into the breach here and will shortly be putting together the third (?) edition of the **Novice Package** and I think, incorporating a relatively simple listings of mainstream zines which would exist to give newcomers some idea of what goes on in the hobby and a good idea of where to go to obtain the games he wants. As I've mentioned before, the use of a word-processor for these sorts of jobs is quite important in keeping the workload down. We've been a bit unfortunate in the past as Ian Shaw and Mark Billenness have been custodians who had problems. Blame has just been attached to the machines they used when it belonged to the people themselves." **Home Of The Brave** 66 (February 1987)

Pete Doubleday responded in **Home of the Brave** 68 (April 1987).

Pete Doubleday: "There is a point up to which you can argue that MFG serves only to confuse novices. However they are different these days. Many (at least one I know of) have come through FRP and are more used to the in-house style of the Hobby. I would argue that most of the rest ought to be able to follow MFG in that it does contain all the info a subscriber would require and only then goes for character assassination. Granted, a certain amount of juggling with presentation may be helpful here. I notice that even the most polite 'iffy' reviews failed to take this line and suggest remedies. Of course Caws can be safely ignored but I would have expected a little more positive feedback from the rest of you. We're not egomaniacs — rather, we're not acting here as such — we are trying to provide a service. We have been planning

it since it became evident that **ZWNN** was no more back in July. The fact that a bunch of Londoners got together later and independently decided something had to be done really isn't germane. **MFG** 1 was quite clearly a flyer and might be better treated as such. On top of which, we have a combination of writing talent (though many own really doesn't seem to fit into the project) and knowledge of today's Hobby that could be hard to rival. With all due respect, John Dodds is a has-been and although I am delighted to recommend his approach to the problem for anyone who doesn't follow ours, it does suffer from his basic defect: his best line of contact with the Hobby at large is through **MFG**. After Ian Shaw and Martin Le Fevre, I should have thought that the chances of editors trading 3:1 with a listings zine are pretty slim.

You see we have thought this out. We acknowledge the problems involved. We are continually looking for ways around them, and we'd like any assistance that anyone deals like offering. . ."

Geoff Challenger: "...I don't see why a Dodds based listings should have to get its source material via Ian Shaw and Martin Le Ryoda. I would have thought the idea as now presented is that John's punters are drawn from the Novice Package Applicants, subbers to **Springboard** and other less experienced Diplomacy players arriving within the hobby. That represents the 'desirable' 30% of the demand for a listings zine. But 60% of the demand comes from editors wanting to see what has been written about them. . .

...I still think **MFG** is more suited to people with hobby experience. But I recently sent the copy of the second issue to someone with little knowledge of the hobby and there's no higher commendation really."

Pete Doubleday: "I thought your implicit defence of word-processed listings zines was a load of cobblers. I will go so far as to admit that a dedicated and competent man could edit **20YO** with a word-processor. I just don't think it's ideal. Firstly the temptation is to add more and more zines with ever more tenuous connections to the Hobby. Related to this the 'comment' section is almost bound to shrink. WPs encourage laziness in any repetitive product: the reason **MFG** reviews change every issue is that we would bore ourselves to death if they didn't. The workload of typing up one issue every nine months isn't heavy and I speak as one who draws the covers and turns the duplicator handle every issue. The workload of rewriting three-line comments thirty times every issue is not so much heavy as excruciating. The inevitable tendency is to a Billeanness M. and just let things sit, which makes you wonder what the point of the exercise is. (Mind you, I have confidence in Doddsy's ability to do rather better. His CV as editor of **Perspiring Dreams**, with such classic one-liners as 'Protest But Subscribe', is unmatched. But what happens if he gives up?)"

Geoff Challenger: "We pass the disc on to someone else. . . It ((A WP)) should help but previous editors of **20YO/ZWNN** have had insufficient rigour to resist the temptations which lie in misuse. The trouble lies in anticipation that there should be something interesting to say about a zine which is different from what was said before. Why? What can a person say about **Thing**, which has changed in the last 3 issues? Simon Billeanness would have said the same thing, phrased differently, Ian Shaw would have lost the disc and said the same thing anyway, Mark B would have reprinted the same thing from disc forgetting to change the address and Martin Le Fevre never did two issues anyway. **MFG** has two people say the same sorts of thing. Who's right?"

One part of this discussion which is germane to the thrust of this issue is the discussion of who a listings zine should be aimed at. Is it aimed specifically at a few novices who might request a copy or to the core of the hobby (particularly editors) who make up the bulk of the readership? Is it possible to produce such a zine which will not only inform the few novices that see it but also entertain the old hands, who make up most of the mailing list? (And here I should point out that **MFG** had a policy *not* to trade with other zines.)

The MFG team assumed that the most a novice needs to know is what games are being run, what the waiting lists are and how reliable the zine is. Beyond that, what more is there to say? They attempted to give an idea of the character of the zine by a highly subjective review. More often than not they failed, falling into lashing out at the nearest target rather than basing their reviews on sound fannish criticism. Still the approach was highly entertaining, provided that you were not one of their targets (or that you had a thick skin).

There is a lingering suspicion that, despite Pete Doubleday's protest to the contrary, MFG was not intended as a service zine *per se* but as a medium for the triumvirate to showcase their writing and in the process show how mean and nasty they could get. Providing a service? Well perhaps that arose as an afterthought. It is hard to credit that the first issue of **Mission From God** should be seen as a flyer, since the format used remained the format that was used throughout the Bowen presidency.

(And for the second time in hobby history John Dodds started a zine, folded a zine and refused to refund subscriptions — Frankly I'm surprised that he has never run of with the MidCon money.)

In the end MFG fizzled out. Or rather, the reviews fizzled out. The original MFG approach worked because zines were reviewed by different reviewers each issue. Not only did this allow for a chance for zines to receive a fair review but it also allowed for differing prospectives. This could only work provided that there was a team of reviewers writing reviews for each issue.

Not only a team of reviewers, but reviewers who had something to say and preferable with style. Towards the end of the Bowen Presidency the pool of reviewers dried up. Worse than that, there was a trend in some of the outside reviews to concentrate on toadying to the editor of the zine being reviewed and blatant crawling. MFG limped on with a few poor issues and eventually Iain decided to pass the zine onto a new crew.

At this time I was fairly confident that the new editor would be Harry Bond (see **The Mark Nelson Experience** Volume One Issue Three for details) but Harry was intent on starting up his own zine and fell out of favour. There was no obvious candidate to take over the zine until...

Andy Key: "Bowen further threatens to quit as editor at the end of the year, and has a good moan about the lack of contributions for reviews. Were I of a cynical character (oh, no, not you, Andy, perish the thought etc.) I might suggest that he could do more to encourage input from outside the usual MFG clique. Actually I had to hold Madi back from volunteering to take over MFG. It would never work. We're just too fluffy, you see." **Electric Monk** 20 (July 1990).

As a result of this comment, Iain Bowen offered Andy Key and Madelaine Key the position of MFG editors-in-chief;⁶ their first issue appeared at ManorCon 1991.

I am not reviewing this issue, as it was the new managements first attempt at producing the zine. Still, the zine showed rays of promise as the inclusion of an article on an aspect of the hobby (the relationships between the Hobby and the pbm field) showed that the editorial team were looking to enlarge the role that the MFG played in the hobby. (The inclusion of articles in a zine listing harkens back more to the glory days of 20YO rather than the glory days of MFG.)

A feature of this issue, which would be amplified in the next, is the sickening style of toadying utilised by two of the reviewers. (In this case David Oya and Harry Bond). Another feature, which would become more prominent in the second issue, was Andy Key's reviewing 'style' and inclusion of 'clever' comments. This resulted in the following

⁶Andy Key, private communication

Brian Creese⁷: "I can't say I was enamoured of the NMR! review... For the first 100 issues, when I was the major editor, we traded universally, which meant that we generally carried 40+ trades. Now my intention was to fold at issue 100, but Ken suddenly got all enthusiastic and decided to take over the main editor role, but to strip it of as much extra work as possible, which meant trading only with Hobby services..."

Overall I felt that Andy was going over the top when dealing with a zine which has run uninterrupted for over twelve years, has accepted numerous orphans from everywhere, never been more than a day or two late over all that time and never pretended to be anything other than what we are - these days a quiet backwater of the Hobby, run by two ageing parents with time to devote to the project. I would suggest, tentatively, that few zines in the history of the Hobby have as impressive a record as ourselves." *Electric Monk* 32 (October 1991)

The hobby waited with baited breath for the second issue. Would it be out for MidCon? No. Out for Xmas? No. Out for the New Year? No. Out for February? No. Was it ever coming out? Would it appear before the next issue of *Froggy*? Then a letter was distributed to zine editors:

Andy Key "You may have noticed the non-appearance of *Mission From God* at the scheduled time. The primary reason for this is, as is traditional with MFG, a shortage of reviews. Despite a sudden flood of reviews from various sources in January and February, we are still lacking any reviews at all for a number of zines. Some of these we see, so can comment on ourselves; others we have never seen and have no idea even whether they're still running."

"The purpose of this rather blatant form letter is to ask if you can comment on any of the following that you see regularly..." (1st March 1992)

This letter raises some interesting point. Were the new editorial team aware of the problems that Iain Bowen had been facing in attracting reviews? What did Andy write in *Electric Monk* 20? "*Bowen... has a moan about the lack of contributions for reviews*". And what is he complaining about nearly two years later? Speak up Mr Key, the boys in the back can't quite hear you. That's right! A lack of reviews. Surely this must have considered before the decision to accept the offer to become em el President was made? Didn't they have a contingency plan? Did they not have a new improved line of reviewers lined up?

Eventually the second issue of *Mission From God* under the Key-Smith editorship arrived in April 1992, nine months or so after the first issue. Before looking in more detail at this issue let's see what two critics wrote.

Iain Bowen "Finally, the latest *Mission from God* has appeared on the streets... As with any Electronic Monastery publication, it is graphically fine and worth the money but about this issue I have some caveats.

As a contributor to MFG for every issue of its existence I find some things sad about this issue. It is partially the reviewing styles of Stuart Eves and Nicholas Parish both of whom tends towards incipient TurboFreakism à la *Zine Register* where turnaround and maps have become the standards that every zine must be judged by. Then there is the comment that: "*It is not a place for zine editors to read about their own zines and enter into moaning about how they were misrepresented nor is it for old lags to swap in-jokes about their favourite targets. MfG reviews should give someone who's never seen a particular zine an idea of what it is like, if this makes the reviews seems dull to the hobby hard-core, then tough.*" This is creeping novice pandering at its worst, the point of MFG is that by its very nature it has to cater for both the novices and the old lags as there are not enough of either to support the publication of the zine on its own. Anyway, when I was a novice, part of the joy of the hobby was finding out what all the in-jokes were.

⁷the most dishonest pollster in the history of the British hobby

Well, I suppose it is all my fault really for giving to 'em in the first place so I can't complain. However, the creepy thing about the damn zine is that virtually every review is "I quite like this zine, yes." The exception to this is the **C'Est Magnifique** review by Stuart Eves which should never have been printed and bloody Harry Bond writing the sort of review that made me fall out with Danny The Nanny." **Y Ddraig Goch** 63 (May 1992)

Bill O'Neil "There is a newish **Mission From God** out... There *may* be a Players vs Gentlemen discussion developing out of some of the comments about the review policy. Although I shall always be found manning the Gentlemen's barricades when it becomes hand to hand, I should rather prefer sufficient compromise to be made with the Objectisiste Girondistes, to keep the Turbeaufrique Sans Coulottes off the streets in the first place. There should certainly be a reliable set of reviews, on the strength of which novices (who have time for games) can try out different zines. On the other hand if even the editors find this product "dull for the hobby hardcore" then this is not "tough" this is 'worrying'. There must be room for some other Purple Pages section, containing some in-jokes and attributed personal views, (clearly not endorsed by the publishers). If the directory ceases to be interesting to a lot of editors and multi-zine subbers I suspect the supply of external reviews will dry up." **De Excidio** 20 (June 1992)

So how does the latest issue of **MFG** shape up? The zine can be split into four sections:

- An Article On Publishing Your Zine
- The Zine Reviews
- A description of all the games that have waiting lists open
- The Cover/editorial/anything else.

The Articles

Zine Poll winning editor **Action Man** has a six page article covering different aspects of running a zine. Just think, if you follow his advice you to could win the Zine Poll and set yourself on a path to become a well-known fan! This is a fine article, which could (should?) easily be re-used as the backbone of a new Novice Editor's Package.

By splitting up the different parts of running a zine into sections (Motivation, Content, Dedication, Publicity, The Means of Production, Worse By Design, The Means of Reproduction, Take The Money and Run, We Know Where You Live, Playing The Game, Meeting the Deadline and Publish & be Damned) **Action Man** covers all the main points of running a zine.

Inevitable there are few topics glossed over, or not mention at all. Nothing was said about the different ways in which a letter column can be constructed ('topicism' vs 'letters as a whole'), or on the use of artwork in fanzines. The discussion on publicity doesn't mention that the best way to get subbers is to become well-known before pubbing your ish, in practice this is either through letter hacking or establishing yourself as an excellent player. Too many people think that all that's required is a goodish review in another zine and then you're away. In practice life ain't like that — reviews in other zines rarely bring in new subbers and do little more than stroke your ego. Giving freebies out at conventions does not normally result in a storm of new subbers stalking you out in the bar; you get a very low rate of return from cons. If you're determined to give out freebies at a con, don't leave them on a fanzine table for people to pick up; give them to people you meet at the con, people are more likely to be influenced by the personal touch. Andy suggests that it is bad form to mail out freebies of a zine to a mailing list of another zine. I disagree, if another editor prints his mailing list go straight ahead and use it! But remember, a personal touch is more likely to gain a new recruit than a mailing which just consists of your zine.

Andy has some good points on the design and layout of a zine, particularly game reports and the effective use of dtp; although I would caution new editors not to be afraid to experiment. There is no one way to produce a zine, and as a matter of fact all the most visually attractive fanzines (and fannishly satisfying) that I have seen have been produced on mimeographs rather than laser-printed dtp. Also, and a point that Andy seems to have forgotten, it's far cheaper to produce a zine via mimeography than pc/litho. Andy infers that it's just as cheap to produce your zine by pc, provided you shop around: This just isn't true. Alas the neo-luddites are winning the day, and the days of the mimeographed fanzine are almost gone.

Andy's comments on the financial side of running a zine, having a separate account for the zine's money and never overextending yourself so that you can't refund your subbers are money are fine. Fine in theory. Running a zine in practice is slightly different, especially if you are a gentleman of leisure.

At the end of the issue is a four-page listing of games. This provides a brief description of each game and after the description gives names of zines that have waiting lists open for that game. This is an excellent idea (though I would not want to see it included every issue) although the accuracy (and length) of description obviously depends on the author's knowledge of the game — there is room for improvement here, the variant reviews are particularly inadequate (as well as being inaccurate in some cases). Still, a useful idea which is another indication of the Key's plans for extending the scope of the zine.

But articles does not make a listings zine good. The existence of a regular feature article may make MFG a better zine, but the *raison d'être* of the zine is to review zines. How well does the zine fair in this most important of departments?

The Reviews

The answer is not too well. Most zines had two, or more, reviewers which is good. Here's a breakdown of the number of reviews for each reviewer in the UK Hobby Section.

Reviewer	Reviews	% of total reviews
Iain Bowen	7	10.8%
Andy Key	17	26.2%
Stuart Eves	12	18.5%
Ken Simpson	4	6.2%
Nicholas Parish	10	15.4%
Vick Hall	2	3.1%
Madelaine Smith	6	9.2%
John Marsden	2	3.1%
Harry Bond	2	3.1%
Mark Firth	2	3.1%
Kathy Collman	1	1.5%

Although there are eleven reviewers it is unfortunate that three of them (Andy Key, Stuart Eves and Nicholas Parish) should account for over 60% of the reviews written. To be blunt Eves and Parish are Turbophreaks, and Andy Key strives too hard to be controversial; his constant attempts at being clever, in the end, grate rather than please. Not content with attempting reviewing Andy has to stick his oar in to reviews written by anyone else by adding remarks, which I suppose, he considers to be clever. He'd do far better to keep a lower profile, although given the calibre of reviews that he's been forced to print who can blame him for trying to distract you from them?

A typical Stuart Eves review would be “*turnaround not good enough, quality of the GMing not quite high enough, not enough diplomacy articles being printed. What about the maps, that’s what I’d like to know about?*” One or two of these ‘reviews’ are just about acceptable, but twelve of them?

I also noted a few inaccuracies in the reviews should Andy should have removed, **Dolchstoß** is not the longest-running zine in the hobby and the comments re Pete Sullivan and orphaning games only show that Stuart Eves would be better renamed as TurboPhreak Eves. **Mopsy** was running 8 variants, two of which were historical; do you think it rates the description “*clearly orientated towards historical variants*” on the facts?

But TurboPhreak Eves review of **Springboard** is a classic. Clearly a man who writes “*I still reckon it’s one of the best zines I’ve seen... and provides a superb introduction to the hobby*” is not one knows where his towel is, and one can only question how accurate his other reviews are. But how’s this for intellectual non-rigour? “*It is, perhaps, significant that those who criticise it did not benefit from a Springboard ‘baptism’, and that very few people who have benefited have any criticism of the zine.*”

It’s only a small point. The smallest of small points and I hesitate to point it out. Surely the main reason why so few ex-**Springboard** players complain about the zine is because if they don’t like it they drop out of the zine and out of the hobby? Indeed there is considerable evidence to suggest that a significant number of people are dropping out of **Springboard** purely because of the way in which it is being run.⁸ Iain Bowen, Steve Doubleday and Pete Sullivan have all stated that if their first point of contact with the hobby had been **Springboard** it would have been their last. A significant condemnation of the manner in which the zine is being run? I think so. And after five or so years where are all the Springboardians in the hobby rallying to Nanny’s defense? The silence is deafening.

The main problem with the reviews printed in the current issue of **Mission From God** is that they are too noncritical. Almost every zine receives the accolade ‘one of the best zines in the hobby’ and very few reviews point out faults in the zine. This is inevitable when you ask for outside reviews, people will tend only to submit reviews for the zines that they enjoy. Furthermore Andy Key has actually refused to run reviews which were too harsh.⁹

Even a few years ago, when **MFG** started, there were a number of ‘bad’ zines in the hobby which deserved, and received, a panning from the reviewers. These days there aren’t very many. Of the zines reviewed in the last issue only one has received unfavourable reviews in most parts of the hobby. Several other zines, whilst being of an ok standard, have editors, or editorial practices, who do not quite make it upto scratch. Yet you will look in vain in **MFG** for negative reviews and realistic appraisals of a zine’s worth.

Andy Key may write¹⁰ “*We hope to give praise where it’s due, and criticism where it’s justified*” but the reality is that **MFG** has been reduced to a journal of plentiful praise. No zine is too bad that the Action Man can’t find something good to say, at the expense of painting a more truthful picture. Objectionable editorial practises? Don’t worry, the **MFG** team will use a large paint brush to cover over the cracks. Whereas **MFG** should be providing its readers with an insight into the hobby all it provides in practise is an insight into the meaningless minds of its reviewers.

Perhaps this is a knee-jerk reaction to the ‘hard-hitting’ review style featured in the original **MFG**? But just as the ol’e time reviewers got carried away in one direction so the current editors have allowed themselves to get carried away in the opposite. What is needed is a review zine that sits in the middle. A zine that gives out praise grudgingly, so that when it gives out some it is something to be noted, provides a

⁸But that’s another article for another issue

⁹Source, Iain Bowen

¹⁰private communication

fair assessment of the place any zine holds in the hobby and isn't afraid to speak up when the circumstance dictate — what trust can put you in a review zine which portrayed **Garbage In, Garbage Out** as being 'one of the best zines in the hobby'? Not much. There needs to be tighter editorial control over the reviews printed, so that the zine is not filled with gushing goody goody reviews at the expense of solid fan criticism.

Richard Egan summed up the problems faced by zine reviewers in **Vienna 36 (July 1987)**

"This issue's Hobby Horse features some zine reviews again. Y'know, I'm often asked what the point is, since few readers seem to follow up good reviews, but at least they heighten awareness of just what is going on in the rest of the hobby, and after all, I do know of subbers who've been tipped off (through these very pages) to a 'zine they enjoyed. With that in mind, I do try to be objective when I review a 'zine: I see little point in giving unqualified praise. Sometimes this goes against my better principles — that any zine editor deserves nothing but credit for even trying, no matter what the results. If he or she gives up their time to keep games running, what right have I or any other zine editor to pick fault?

It's the conflict between these two attitudes to zine reviewing that keeps me from doing more, but once in a while I can throw caution to the wind with the best of them..."

Given the amount of time it has taken to produce this issue, one would have thought that the zine would be complete in all the minor details. But there is every sign of being a rush-job.

Not every zine has the number/month of the issue being reviewed. Several zines have incomplete listing of the games being run and/or the waiting lists. It appears to me that this issue was produced in a rush, several obvious typographical errors exist. Given the amount of time it's taken to produce, this smacks of poor editing.

The international section is a sorry creature. Frankly I'm shocked at how few international trades the MFG team have. They only manage to review 8 zines, must do better!

MFG: A Conclusion

Whilst the continual expansion in the scope of MFG through the inclusion of articles is welcomed, the main thrust of the zine has to be the reviews. The editors are faced by a problem, not only must they acquire sufficient reviews to be able to produce the zine but these reviews must be of a much higher standard than those which are currently used.

"We're back, somewhat later than planned. There are various reasons for this, but one of them is that only a handful of reviews arrived by the original deadline, and despite a steady trickle since then, we were a number of reviews short even at the start of March" **Mission From God 'Mark'**, April 1992

Not only does this problem put the future of a MFG as a credible review zine in doubt but it will actually accelerate the problem: who wants to spend time writing reviews for MFG in its current state when the clear editorial policy is to reject anything that appears at all critical? Perhaps, after all, the fundamental problem is, as Andy Key put it right at the beginning, "*It would never work. We're just too fluffy you see.*" Are the MFG team capable of coming down from their imposed fluffy ground and producing a review zine that lives up to all that is conjured into the imagination at the mention of the **Mission From God** name?

We await the third coming with interest...

NEXT ISSUE...NEXT ISSUE...

Issue Six will be produced for the second Sunday in August and all going well will be distributed at the August Yorkmeet. It may not be finished for then though because I am currently finishing the next issue of **The Mouth Of Sauron**, the second one this year! Promises, promises...

BACK ISSUES

Whilst I don't keep back-issues in stock I can reprint them at 50 pence an issue if you're interested.

Issue One (*March 1992*) Discussion of **Springboard** 54 and Danny Collman's concept of fannishness. Should **Springboard** be fannish? Steve Doubleday's idea of a Hobby Bond and an argument in favour of **Springboard** farming out games à la **CGS**. A quick history of the **CGS**.

Issue Two (*April 1992*) Which zines have influenced other zines? Were **Ethil The Frog** and **Costaguanna** the first two fannish dip zines? The ability of current zines to dominate the Zine Poll. Which editors do I hold in respect and why? A quick resume of Steve Doubleday's role in the hobby, why hasn't he had more recognition? Pete Sullivan exposed as a Spanking man. A letter from Andy Key containing a plea from the heart for a return to niceness.

Issue Three (*May 1992*) Hobby Bond's favourite issue! Discussion on the material in issues 1-2 followed by **The Hobby Bond Story**. An account of my first encounter with Harry in February 1988, Harry's SF fanac, how Harry entered the Hobby, how Harry's SF fanac influenced not only his approach to running a dip zine but how it effected other's perceptions of how he would produce a dip zine, an account of the expectations of **U-Bend** and the hard reality, comments on **U-Bend** 8-10 (Including comments on students as editors, the Gladrags and the Zine Poll Results) and the proper use of mimeography. Also an excellent letter from David Hood.

Soon to be revised since I have secured several interesting SF zines with previously undiscovered accounts of Harry's activity at the last NovaCon!

Issue Four (*June 1992*) How quickly can a fanzine critic determine if a zine will be 'integral part of the hobby for years to come' with examples of zines that didn't make the grade, Fanzine Reviews and Schools of Fanzine Criticism, how should diplomacy zine be reviewed — is fannishness a valid point of view?, can 'SF' terminology be properly used by dipsters, Turbophreakism in the UK with regards to **Greatest Hits**, comments on **Greatest Hits** past and present, a look at Fan Social Status in the diplomacy world and letters from Andrew York and Per Westling.

"Yorkshire people have a long-standing reputation for dourness, pig-headedness, and arrogance. Is this true of all Yorkshire folk?" *Andy Key Electric Monk 19 (June 1990)*